

May 21, 2013

Mr. John Goodrich II
15 Waid Road
Monson, MA 01057

RE: Questions for School Committee submitted May 8, 2013

Dear Mr. Goodrich:

On behalf of the Monson School Committee, I would like to thank you for your participation in the Budget Hearing held on May 8, 2013 as well as the questions you submitted for consideration. Although I answered many of these questions during the meeting, I thought it would be appropriate to respond to your request formally and document the response for any member of our Community that may also wish to review the information. The responses below formulated by Josh Farber and I as I enlisted his help in the Curriculum and Social Worker questions. I have retyped your questions word for word below and added the response.

1. What positions in the Central Office are being proposed to be eliminated?

Response: The Finance Subcommittee which consists of Peter Sauriol, Don Smith, Dr. Ted Malvey and I have had some discussion regarding some sort of organizational restructure among the Administrative Leadership Team, as well as other positions in the Central office. At the present time, we have deferred any major change until the new Superintendent is hired. It is on our radar, but we believe the new Superintendent should have input and the final decision on any change.

2. What courses are offered above and beyond the state mandated minimum? If none, why do we need a Curriculum Director?

Response:

The state does not mandate a "minimum" number of courses. Instead, it mandates that specific content and skills are covered and clustered in specific curricular areas - how we decide to deliver that content is up to us in some cases, and more recently, delineated by grade level in others - and then assess our ability to deliver on that by assessing students (through MCAS and other tests). Those areas change at the state level on a

cycle - most recently in the last year, Math and English curricula mandated by Race to the Top have been completely changed, necessitating a complete and systematic overhaul of how we teach those subjects, and although teachers are and should be involved in that process of adaptation, that level of redesign is not something that can be completed solely by individual teachers who are struggling to teach what they already know every day with classrooms full of students.

The role of a curriculum director is not to DESIGN courses, or to establish them (that should happen at the school level, and - if it is a significant enough change - it must be brought to the School Committee). Instead, as the DSAC report makes clear, the role of a curricular director is to oversee and coordinate depth, breadth, and diversity of content and its effective delivery for all areas for the district overall, ensuring that all students will be able to receive and access content in ways that maximize the potential for every student to learn that content and use it in testing and in the real world. That oversight includes curriculum design, which is not the same as course design - instead, it includes the vertical alignment (how ideas develop from k-12 in certain areas) and horizontal alignment (how that content is taught consistently in every class in each grade), unit outlines, pacing guides, and other aspects of content delivery in all content areas - something which must be done at the district level, because it crosses the "line" between schools, because it should be designed by teams of teachers which need clear direction and mandates and guidance by k-12 leaders who understand the big picture, and because it involves ongoing retraining and PD that should trickle down from and be planned at a district level.

Because there are constant new developments which cause us to rethink how students learn, because of new issues (such as 21st century learning) which add new demands to curriculum, and because the state continues to change and add to, on a regular basis, both what content we should teach, and how we will be assessed, the work of a curricular director is ongoing, and adaptive.

3. Why do we continue to need a Business Manager when all services appear to be outsourced?

Response: Similar to my reply in question 1, **at** this time we have decided to maintain this position in the Central office. A couple of key reasons: One, Mr. Smith provides stability and leadership in the Central office, and oversees all of the Finance, Contracts, Facilities, Budget, as well as Compliance initiatives with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This position to some degree pays for itself from an ROI perspective in all the day to day management, as well as Contract oversight. Don is also involved in

grant development and procurement. Second, during Pat Dardenne's tenure as our Superintendent, a preliminary analysis/study was done to determine if it was worth "outsourcing" the Business office. The initial findings did not provide enough justification to pursue that end. I would also estimate that our new Superintendent may look at ways to reduce our cost in this area, but again at this time, we decided this was not something we wished to pursue.

4. Why is there a clear and disproportionate level of reductions to the Elementary School and High School budgets when compared to the Middle School?

Response: It appears that the cuts are greater to the High School because of the initial budget request. As I mentioned during our meeting, Dr. Linkenhoker included items such as the School Resource Officer in his Budget request. This and other items requested made the reductions higher than the Middle School. As for the elementary school, this is really an enrollment issue. The number of kids coming into Quarry Hill continues to decline. So based on the budget request and true year of year spending, this school had reductions as well, greater than the Middle School. It should also be noted that during our Budget hearing I expressed concern over the large number of reductions at the Elementary School. Since the May 8, meeting, we have restored some lien item reductions to this school. The entire School Committee has yet to approve all of the reductions, but wanted to provide you the latest information available.

5. What is the cost of paying two Superintendents and where is that shown in the budget?

Response: The Superintendent's Salary line is 9a which shows the \$125,460 annual. There is some additional expense for the interim, but that is calculated per diem so I don't believe that figure has been calculated in total for FY 2013.

6. Moving forward, can an approved copy of the budget be posted on the website and updated as needed to see where the money is actually going?

Response: Since our meeting, a copy of the proposed Budget has been posted on the website. It should have been done previously. We will work to make sure it is there in the future. I will also ask Don Smith, our Business Manager, if there is a way to update and post the information in the future. I do not believe the original budget worksheet is updated, as we use the Summary sheet and Variance report for any future discrepancy. The School Committee reviews this report at almost every meeting.

7. With the high amount of special needs, is it really cost effective to eliminate the Social Worker and reduce H.S. Guidance?

Response: Josh Farber provided some insight into this one, and mentioned that it was not cost effective in the long term to eliminate this position. I mentioned during our meeting, that the cuts proposed were not finalized, and the entire Committee still had to approve. Since our meeting, Kathleen Norbut made a motion to restore the funding for this position. It was approved so this position will no longer be cut from the Budget.

Some final thoughts both to address your questions as well as the last paragraph you submitted to the School Committee.

The School Committee expects to charge the new superintendent with an audit of central office operations and administration. Many School Committee members including Josh Farber and I asked that very question during the superintendent interviews. That said, the common perception that strong teachers and building-level administrators are sufficient to adapt to the fast-changing needs of our school systems is inconsistent with the major changes in education which have been mandated at the state and federal levels in the past decade...and which continue to come to us every year, with new mandates that cannot be appropriately managed at the building level

The DSAC report makes clear that the State sees district level support as lacking, not top-heavy. Given that, if we as a town want to continue to have oversight over the schools at all we must continue to recognize the need for significant change and thus substantial k-12 oversight at the district level, and accept that we will need to retain a significant percentage of our district-level staff in the medium term.

As many people have noted, strong and passionate teaching staff is one of our greatest assets as a school system, and it pains us to have to make cuts to that staff. But the days where a school was considered successful if and ONLY if its teachers were good at the classroom level are not coming back, and it is important for the community to recognize that the No Child Left Behind mandates - including the adoption of entirely new and significantly different k-12 curricula, and the need to demonstrate full horizontal and vertical alignment of those curricula - strongly tip the scales towards huge numbers of new unfunded mandates about how teaching and learning are done on a district scale, how we coordinate that teaching, and how that teaching is assessed

which we must adhere to in order to be able to retain community control of our schools. Failure to adhere to those mandates will continue to result in deep and ongoing failure to and of the schools - something our children, and our community, cannot afford.

Most of the budget cuts proposed in this last round sacrifice long-term goals and initiatives for short term survival. In the end, until we as a Community are able to support the essentials in our Schools at what all seem to agree are reasonable minimum levels, the budget process at this time are not about efficiency. We are simply making one sacrifice after another and trying to prioritize programming and minimize impact for all students. This has become increasingly difficult given that our Net School Spending dollars are lower than 3 years ago. We are at a point, where much of the Fixed Cost in our schools is constant and increasing while we have declining enrollment and declining revenue from the State. That decline in enrollment is not large enough to make substantive change in the fixed cost infrastructure, while we struggle to manage all the priorities within the variable cost that we may more control over budget wise.

The School Committee would like to thank you again for your providing us the questions and being involved in the process. We could likely write much more to tell you where we are headed and some of the goals we have as a group. Hopefully we have provided you the information you requested as well as some insight into how we are moving the district forward in a positive way, given the current environment we are in.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Joel Keller
Vice Chairman